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HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE STRUCTURE OF SOVIET ETHNOGRAPHIC SCIENCE

The relationship between ethnography (ethnology) and history is one of the major problems facing ethnographic science and attracting serious attention of scholars in the USSR and abroad. One of the manifestations of this interest was a representative symposium „Historical Ethnology Today“, held in Vienna in 1982 and participated in, among others, by Soviet ethnographers¹.

Soviet ethnography was long dominated by the view that its entire subject matter made it a historical science². Therefore historical ethnography was not identified as a special area in it. However, the ethnographic study of our time, which not infrequently had purely applied tasks and which has been gradually gaining in intensity, especially since the late 1940's, has led to a certain specialization of historical and ethnographic research and to the more and more frequent use of the concept of „historical ethnography“. Its content being fairly uncertain, it was interpreted in different ways. This question has exhibited particular acuteness in recent times. This has been due to the efforts to prepare for publication the first marxist conceptual terminological glossary – a joint effort of the academies of sciences of the USSR and the GDR – under the general editorship of Yu. Bromley (USSR) and H. Strobach (GDR)³.

For instance, in his work of 1961 S. P. Tolstov said that historical ethnography was the entire area of ethnographers' historical research ranging from the prehistoric era to our time⁴. In his university textbook „Ksnovy etnografii“ (Fundamentals of

1. *Historische Ethnologie heute (Historical Ethnology Today)*. Hrsg. K. Wernhart. Horn-Wien, 1985.

2. S. P. Tolstov. *Sovetskaya shkola v etnografii (soviet School in Ethnography)*. – *Sovetskaya etnografiya (Soviet Ethnography)*. 1947, No. 2, pp. 14–15.

3. A ten-volume *Svod etnograficheskikh ponyatiy i terminov (Glossary of Ethnographic Concepts and Terms)* is in preparation.

4. S. P. Tolstov. *Nekotorye problemy vseмирной istorii v svete dannykh sivremennoy istoricheskoy etnografii (Certain Problems of World History in the Light of the Data of Modern Historical Ethnography)*. – *Voprosy istorii (Problems of History)*. 1961, No 11.

Ethnography), published in 1968, S. A. Tokarev defined historical ethnography as a „special area of ethnography“ limited to the study of „ancient and extinct peoples“⁵. But the many publications by Soviet ethnographers which have appeared in the last few decades and which, judging by their titles, are devoted specially to historical ethnography, show that, in the main, they deal not only and not so much with „ancient and extinct“ peoples as with the more or less distant past of the living peoples⁶.

The vagueness of this term apparently induces some ethnographers to renounce its use altogether. For instance, it does not occur in the handbook „Vvedeniye v etnografiyu“ (Introduction to Ethnography), by R. F. Its, although it contains a special section treating of the conceptual apparatus of ethnography⁷): M. A. Chlenov, proposing his scheme of division of ethnographic science, did not include historical ethnography in it either⁸. In one of their recently published articles Yu. V. Bromley and M. V. Kryukov arrived at the correct conclusion that the subject matter of ethnography has research zones which go beyond the bounds of historical science proper and that the most important area of ethnography is historical ethnography, which „includes above all ethnic history“⁹, but the content of this concept as a whole is not disclosed by them.

The study of this question undertaken by the present author in the course of work on the entry „Historical Ethnography“ for the aforementioned Glossary with due account of the orientations of research by Soviet scholars in this field¹⁰ has brought him to the conclusion that historical ethnography covers the entire part of the subject matter of ethnography which is included in historical science. Thus, historical ethnography as a special branch (discipline) of ethnographic science incorporates a number of subdisciplines, which study the ethnogeny, ethnic history and ethnography of the extinct ethnoses, the genesis and history of the traditional forms of every day folk life and culture (in the case of preclass society of all culture in the broad sense of the word), and the formation and evolution of economic-cultural types and historical-ethnographic areas¹¹.

5. S. A. Tokarev. *V vedeniye (Introduction)*. — *Osnovy etnografii (Fundamentals of Ethnography)*. Ed. by S. A. Tokarev. Moscow, 1968.
6. T. A. Zhdanko. *Ocherki istoricheskoy etnografii karakalpakov. Rodo-plemennaya structura i rasseleniye v XIX-nachale XXv. (Essays in the Historical Ethnography of the Karakalpak. Clan-Tribal Structure and Settlement in the 19th Century and the Early 20th Century)*. Moscow-Leningrad, 1950; S. I. Vainshtein. *Istoricheskaya etnografiya tuvintsev. Problemy kochevogo khozyaystva (Historical Ethnography of the Tuvinsians. Problems of Nomad Economy)*. Moscow, 1972; Ya. V. Chesnov. *Istoricheskaya etnografiya stran Indokitaya (Historical Ethnography of the Countries of Indochina)*. Moscow, 1973.
7. R. F. Its. *Vvedeniye v etnografiyu (Introduction into Ethnography)*. Leningrad, 1974.
8. M. A. Chlenov. *O vnutrennem chlenenii etnograficheskoy nauki (Concerning the Internal Division of Ethnographic Science)*. — *Aktualnyie problemy etnografii (Relevant Problems of Ethnography)*. Moscow, 1973.
9. Yu. V. Bromley, M. V. Kryukov. *Etnografiya: mesto v sisteme nauk, shkoly, metody (Ethnography: Place in the System of Sciences. Schools, Methods)*. — *Sovetskaya etnografiya*. 1987, No. 3, p. 48.
10. S. Arutjunov, Y. Bromley. *Historisch-Ethnografische Forschungen in der UdSSR (Historical Ethnographic Research in the USSR)*. — *Historische Ethnologie heute*, pp. 19–133.
11. See S. I. Vainshtein. *Istoricheskaya etnografiya v strukture etnograficheskoy nauki (Historical Ethnography in the Structure of Ethnographic Science)*. — *Sovetskaya etnografiya*. 1987, No. 4, p. 79.

The foregoing leads to the conclusion that the study of „ancient and extinct peoples“, which S. A. Tokarev thought was the only task of historical ethnography, is only part of the research zone of this area of our science, forming a specific subdiscipline-palaeoethnography. The latter term has already long been adopted in Soviet ethnographic science, although it was not infrequently associated only with archaeological research being carried out by ethnographic institutions, and even when palaeoethnographic problems were not even raised.

The subject matter of historical ethnography also includes historical research zones of such borderline areas of ethnography as ethnic art history, ethnopscychology, ethnolinguistics, ethnodemography, ethnogeography, etc. It may be asked, perhaps historical ethnography should also include the field study of the disappearing forms of folk everyday life and culture, characterised mainly by realia of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, or even survivals of older epochs down to the prehistoric? Strictly speaking, if these relic phenomena of old traditional culture are studied as practised by the population (even if they are kept only in the memory of very old people) they all in one form or another exist in our present-day life („living old times“) displaying the entire complexity of its connections with the past. This does not by far contradict the fact that the purposeful field study of the relic forms of every day life and culture is carried out above all for developing questions of historical ethnography, forming the key component of its source study base.

Present-day Soviet research in the field of historical ethnography shows fairly substantial differences in the degrees of development of its individual subdisciplines. Thus, undeniable successes have been attained in the study of problems of primitive state^{1 2}, of the ethnogeny and ethnic history of a number of peoples^{1 3}, of the history of their economy, social organization, and beliefs^{1 4}, and in the compilation of historical-ethnographic atlases^{1 5}. However, it has to be admitted that in the field of cultural and genetic research, especially in the study of the processes of formation of ethnic cultures and economic-cultural types and in the development of the regularities of these processes and of the procedure of their study has been achieved much less

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12. *M. O. Kosven*. Ocherki istorii pervobytnoy kultury (Essays in the History of Primitive Culture). Moscow, 1953; *Yu. I. Semyonov*. Kak vzniklo chelovechestvo? (How Did Mankind Come into Existence?). Moscow, 1966; *B. A. Frolov*. Chisla v grafike paleolita (Numbers in the Graphic Art of the Palaeolithic). Novosibirsk, 1974.
13. *R. G. Kuzeyev*. Proiskhozhdeniye bashkirskogo naroda (The Origin of the Bashkir People). Moscow, 1974; *Ethnogenez narodov Severa* (The Ethnogeny of the Peoples of the North). Moscow, 1980.
14. *M. V. Kryukov*. Sistema rodstva kitaytsev (Kinship System of the Chinese). Moscow, 1972; *Problemy istorii obshchestvennogo soznaniya aborigenov Sibiri* (Problems of the History of the Social Consciousness of the Aborigines of Siberia). Leningrad, 1981.
15. *Istoriko-etnograficheskiy atlas Sibiri* (Historical-Ethnographic Atlas of Siberia). Ed. by M. G. Levin and L. P. Potapov. Moscow-Leningrad, 1961; *Ruskiye. Istoriko-etnograficheskiy atlas* (The Russians. Historical-Ethnographic Atlas). Ed. by S. P. Tolstov. Moscow, 1967.

than in other areas of historical ethnography¹⁶. But works by scholars abroad, as a rule, give these major and interesting questions of historical ethnography still less attention.

The reasons for the retardation of cultural and genetic studies are sufficiently complex and can hardly have one explanation in all cases. Some of them will be discussed here. One of the reasons which the author classes with the basis goes back to the underestimation and even negation of the possibilities of the cultural and genetic school in ethnography developed at the boundary of the 20th century, especially in Western science. As is known, this school originated in the works of 19th-century evolutionists, who pioneered the historical study of folk culture, of the regularities of its development and of the genesis of its individual components. However, the theory of the evolution of human culture, so clearly reflected in works by Edward Tylor, James Frazer, Lewis Henry Morgan, and its other researchers, with their conception about progress as the basis of development, in the conditions of the reaction of Western philosophers to Marxism at the turn of the century incurred criticism on the part of a number of schools and current in ethnography. F. Boas, the followers of his „historical school“, „diffusionists“, „functionalists“ and exponents of other currents were largely right in criticizing the weaker aspects of one-sided evolutionism. At the same time, Boas evolved a number of very important methodological questions of the study of the genesis of folk culture and of the perfection of the field research procedure. Boas said that if history were to be understood, it was not enough to know what things were like, it was necessary to know how they had come to be so.¹⁷ But, Boas's contrasting to the regularities of the historical process of the relativist conception of the plurality of unique ethnic cultures and of their multilinear development, his virtual renunciation of the comparative method and his underestimation of ethnographic facts for the reconstruction of culturogenesis eventually precluded him and his pupils from creating any integral picture of the genesis of the cultures of the peoples of the world, for which he on many occasions appealed for sincerely aspired. This paradox of Boas's creative endeavour has been aptly summed up by Claude Levy-Strauss: „... to those who reproach him of having failed to re-create the history of a certain aspect of civilization, to which he nevertheless devoted the greater part of his life, he gave the following heroic answer: regrettably, we don't have a single fact which would shed light on development in these fields“.¹⁸ But then, alas, it has to be admitted that not Boas alone thought so. This idea is shared by many living Western ethnographers (and not by them alone!) carried away by structuralism, system-typological and other new

16. A number of valuable and interesting investigation have been carried out in this field, too, but they are concerned mainly not with the genesis of ethnic cultures, but with the origin and evolution of individual common forms of culture-agriculture, cattle-breeding, deerraizing, family and marriage. See *B. V. Andrianov*. Drevniye orositelny sistemy Priaralya (Ancient Irrigation Systems of the Aral Area). Moscow, 1969; *S. A. Semyonov*. Proiskhozhdeniye zemledel'ya (The Origin of Agriculture). Leningrad, 1974; *V. A. Shnirelman*. Proiskhozhdeniye skotovodstva: kulturno-istoricheskaya problema (The Origin of Pastoralism: A Cultural-Historical Problem). Moscow, 1980; *Yu. I. Semyonov*. Proiskhozhdeniye braka i semyi (The Origin of the Family and Marriage). Moscow, 1974; *G. M. Vasilevich, M. G. Levin*. Tipy olenevodstva i ikh proiskhozhdeniye (Types of Deer-Breeding and Their Origin). – *Sovetskaya etnografiya*. 1951, No. 1.

17. *F. Boas*. The Methods of Ethnology. – *American Anthropologist*. 1920, Vol. 22, No. 4.

18. *C. Levy-Strauss*. *Anthropologie structurale* (Structural Anthropology). Paris, 1958.

currents in ethnography. At the same time, modern Western ethnology exhibits an increasingly mounting interest in problems of historical ethnology, considered above all within the framework of such currents as ethnohistory and cultural history. The noticeable increase of interest in these problems found expression in the course of the aforementioned special international symposium „Historical Ethnology Today“. „Ethnohistory and Cultural History in Vienna“. by K. Wernhart; „Toward the Clarification of the Concept of ‚Historical Anthropology‘“, by G. Weiss; „The present Situation in Historical Ethnology in the FRG“, by U. Braukamper, „Does Historical Ethnology Exist in France?“, by B. Rupp-Eisenreich; „The Future of the Past in British Social Anthropology“, by I. Lewis; „The Present Situation in Historical Ethnology in the USA“, by J. Vansina, and other papers contained a serious analysis of the state of historical ethnology in modern Western science, of its achievements and serious problems.¹⁹

In contrast to Western ethnology, the majority of the exponents of the Soviet ethnographic school, who relied in their studies on Marxist methodology, constantly gave considerable attention to the historical method of folk culture forms they studied. Well-known Soviet scholars – S. P. Tolstov, A. P. Okladnikov, S. V. Ivanov, M. G. Levin, L. P. Potapov, B. A. Rebakov, M. V. Kryukov, to mention but seven – have made a notable contribution to the study of the history of the formation of the ethnic cultures of the peoples of the world. But, as said earlier, in the last few decades the interest in such research among Soviet ethnographers has considerably declined, although several valuable investigations have been carried out in this field and, what is particularly gratifying, some of them have been conducted by scholars of non-Russian soviet republics. Among the latter a special reference should be made to the original and very interesting work by V. M. Batchayev devoted to the basic problems of the genesis of the ethnic culture of the Balkars and the Karachai.²⁰

The methods of study of ethnoculturogenesis practised by Soviet researchers reject the weaker aspect of evolutionism – the idea of the one-sidedness of the cultural and historical process, of its exclusive development from the simple to the complex. Development may also assume many-sided forms, be considerably influenced by diffusions, proceed not only from the simple to the complex, but also in the opposite direction, and, more frequently, show a combination of the two, externally similar phenomena may not only have a common element, but also different origins and perform different functions, etc.²¹

19. K. Wernhart. Ethnohistorie und Kulturgeschichte in Wien; G. Weiss. Zur Kä rung des Begriffes „Historische Anthropologie“; U. Braukämper. Gegenwärtige Situation der „Historische Anthropologie“; B. Rupp-Eisenreich. Gibt es eine historische Ethnologie in Frankreich? ; I. Lewis. Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit in der Britischen Sozialanthropologie; J. Vansina. Gegenwärtige Situation der Historischen Anthropologie in USA. – Historische Ethnologie heute. Horn-Wien, 1985.

20. B. M. Batchayev, Iz istorii traditsionnoy kultury balkartsev i karachayevtsev (From the History of the Traditional Culture of the Balkars and the Karachai). Nalchik, 1986.

21. It will also be noted that the „classical“ evolutionists practically never turned even to the key problems of the genesis of ethnic culture, but studied predominantly primitive culture and its survivals among modern peoples and the origin of the family and religions.

Soviet historical ethnography has registered substantial achievements in the development and use of the comparative historical method, which plays a fundamental role in the study of the genesis of ethnic cultures and their individual components, including in the reconstruction of their archetypes, i. e., the oldest, original forms, and their subsequent evolution. This method is based on the conception of the historical development of all forms of folk culture – the conception which obey a number of general regularities. This development proceeds unevenly both due to internal (endogenous) processes, determined above all by socio-economic factors, and to diffusion – the cultural influence of other ethnoses. Some innovations which have penetrated from the outside shortly become extinct, others form an organic part of culture participating in its further genesis (the basic factors are functional requirements, ecology and stereotypes of traditions). Innovations of endogenous and exogenous (diffusive) origin, which have entered culture in certain historical epochs and participating in its further genesis, form historical and genetic strata. They can be identified only by a comparative historical analysis and have both relative and absolute chronology. The use of the comparative historical method also presupposes comparative typological analysis both at the synchronic and at the diachronic (historical typology) levels.²²

The study of the genesis and evolution of ethnic cultures is impossible not only without the identification of their historical genetic strata and without the consideration of ecological factors in this process, but also without the study of the role of economic-cultural types as a whole.

The procedure of such research, employed in a number of the author's works²³, will be left out here. It will only be indicated that the procedure of cultural and genetic research requires further perfection, in particular, an improvement of the methods of relative and absolute chronologization of the historical-genetic strata of traditional everyday life culture and of the methods of integral use of archaeological,

22. Concerning the use of the comparative historical method see *A. I. Pershits*. Problema sravnitel'no-istoricheskogo sinteza (Problem of Comparative Historical Synthesis). – *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 1980, No. 4; etc.

23. See *S. I. Vainshtein*. Problema proiskhozhdenia olenovodstva v Yevrazii (The Problem of the Origin of Deer-Breeding in Eurasia). – *Sovetskaya etnografiya*, 1970, No. 6; 1971, No. 5; *S. I. Vainshtein*. Problema genezisa tuvinskoy narodnoy kultury (Problem of the Genesis of Tuvian Folk Culture). – *Problemy altaistiki i mongolovedeniya* (Problems of Altaic and Mongolic Studies). Elista, 1972; *S. I. Vainshtein*. Problema proiskhozhdeniya i formirovaniya khozyaystvenno-kulturnogo tipa kochevykh skotovodov umernogo poysa Yevrazii (The Problem of the Origin and Formation of the Economic-Cultural Type of the Nomad Cattle-Breeders of the Temperate Zone of Eurasia). – *Doklad na IX Mexhdunarodnom kongresse antropologicheskikh i etnograficheskikh nauk* (Paper Presented at the 9th International Congress of the Anthropological and Ethnographic Sciences. Chicago). Moscow, 1973; *S. I. Vainshtein*. Istoriya narodnogo iskusstva Tuvy (History of the Folk Art of Tuva). Moscow, 1974; *S. I. Vainshtein* (in co-authorship with M. V. Kryukov). Sedlo i stremya (Saddle and Stirrup). – *Sovetskaya etnografiya*, 1984, No. 6; *S. I. Vainshtein*. O nekotorykh zakonomernostyakh genezisa etnicheskikh kultur (Concerning Certain Regularities of the Genesis of Ethnic Cultures). – *Genezis i evolyutsiya etnicheskikh kultur v Sibiri* (Genesis and Evolution of Ethnic Cultures in Siberia), Novosibirsk, 1987; *S. I. Vainshtein* (in co-authorship with V. A. Korenyako). O genezise iskusstva kochevnikov: avary (Concerning the Genesis of the Art of Nomads: the Avars). – *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 1986, No. 1.

written, linguistic, anthropological and other sources, alongside ethnic cultures in particular, the role in these processes of the interaction between subethnic and superethnic components of culture, formed in the conditions of different economic-cultural types, have not been sufficiently researched. Broadening the source study base of cultural and genetic research necessitates new methods of collecting field materials in the present conditions²⁴.

24. See *S. I. Vainshtein*. *Kulturno-geneticheskoye napravleniye v etnografii i polevyie issledovaniya* (Cultural and Genetic Current in Ethnography and Fields Studies). — *Vsesoyuznaya sessiya po itogam polevykh etnograficheskikh i antropologicheskikh issledovaniy v 1984—1985 g. Tezisy dokladov* (All-Union Session Devoted to the Results of Ethnographic and Anthropological Field Studies Carried Out in 1984—1985. Abstracts of Papers). Ioshkar-Ola, 1986.